THE NANTUCKET SONGS

NED ROREM

BOOSEY & HAWKES

HISTORICAL
Nantucket
P-F-M-83-121-B
ASSOCIATION.

THE NANTUCKET SONGS

Ten Songs for Voice and Piano

To the Nantucket Historical Association

Cordially

NED ROREM

Ned Rorem

$7.50

BOOSEY & HAWKES

1983

1. SONG

From whence cometh song? –
From the tear, far away,
From the hound giving tongue,
From the quarry's weak cry.

From whence, love?
From the dirt in the street,
From the bolt stuck in its groove,
From the cur at my feet.

Whence, death?
From dire hell's mouth,
From the ghost without breath,
The wind shifting south.

–Theodore Roethke (1908-63)

From *The Far Field* from the Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke.
© 1964 by Theodore Roethke.
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2. THE DANCE

In Breughel's great picture, The Kermess,
the dancers go round, they go round and
around, the squeal and the blare and the
tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles
tipping their bellies (round as the thick-
sided glasses whose wash they impound)
their hips and their bellies off balance
to turn them. Kicking and rolling about
the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those
shanks must be sound to bear up under such
rollicking measures, prance as they dance
in Breughel's great picture, The Kermess.

– William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

From *Collected Later Poems*
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3. NANTUCKET

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow

changed by white curtains –
Smell of cleanliness –

Sunshine of late afternoon –
On the glass tray

a glass pitcher, the tumbler
turned down, by which

a key is lying – And the
immaculate white bed.

– William Carlos Williams

From *Collected Earlier Poems*
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4. SONG

Go, lovely Rose –
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her that's young,
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That hadst though sprung
In deserts where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired:
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

Then die – that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee;
How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair.

– Edmund Waller (1606-1687)

5. UP-HILL

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting place?
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yea, beds for all who come.

– Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

6. MOTHER, I CANNOT MIND MY WHEEL

Mother, I cannot mind my wheel;
  My fingers ache, my lips are dry:
O, if you feel the pain I feel!
  But O, who ever felt as I?

No longer could I doubt him true –
  All other men may use deceit;
He always said my eyes were blue,
  And often swore my lips were sweet.
– Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864)

7. FEAR OF DEATH

What is it now with me
And is it as I have become?
Is there no state free from the boundary lines
Of before and after? The window is open today

And the air pours in with piano notes
In its skirts, as though to say, "Look, John,
I've brought these and these" – that is,
A few Beethovens, some Brahmses,

A few choice Poulenc notes . . . Yes,
It is being free again, the air, it has to keep coming back
Because that's all it's good for.
I want to stay with it out of fear

That keeps me from walking up certain steps,
Knocking at certain doors, fear of growing old
Alone, and of finding no one at the evening end
Of the path except another myself

Nodding a curt greeting: "Well, you've been awhile
But now we're back together, which is what counts."
Air in my path, you could shorten this,
But the breeze had dropped, and silence is the last word.
– John Ashbery (b. 1927)

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8. THOUGHTS OF A YOUNG GIRL

"It is such a beautiful day I had to write you a letter
From the tower, and to show I'm not mad:
I only slipped on the cake of soap of the air
And drowned in the bathtub of the world.
You were too good to cry much over me.
And now I let you go." Signed, The Dwarf.

I passed by in the late afternoon
And the smile still played about her lips
As it has for centuries. She always knows
How to be utterly delightful. Oh my daughter,
My sweetheart, daughter of my late employer, princess,
May you not be long on the way!
–John Ashbery

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9. FERRY ME ACROSS THE WATER

"Ferry me across the water,
  Do, boatman, do."
"If you've a penny in your purse
  I'll ferry you."

"I have a penny in my purse,
  And my eyes are blue;
So ferry me across the water,
  Do, boatman, do!"

"Step into my ferry-boat,
  Be they black or blue,
And for the penny in your purse
  I'll ferry you."
– Christina Rossetti

10. THE DANCER

Behold the brand of beauty tossed!
See how the motion does dilate the flame!
Delighted love his spoils does boast,
And triumph in this game.
Fire, to no place confined,
Is both our wonder and our fear;
Moving the mind,
As lightning hurled through the air.

High heaven the glory does increase
Of all her shining lamps, this artful way;
The sun, in figures such as these,
Joys with the moon to play;
To the sweet strains they advance,
Which do result from their own spheres,
As this nymph's dance
Moves with the numbers which she hears.
– Edmund Waller

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The cycle was commissioned by The Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation. It was composed between November, 1978 and May, 1979 on the island of Nantucket, hence the title. An apt subtitle might be *Popular Songs,* insofar as "Popular" means "entertaining" as opposed to "classically" indirect. Indeed, these songs – merry or complex or strange though their texts may seem – aim away from the head and toward the diaphragm. They are, as collegians say, emotional rather than intellectual, and need not be understood to be enjoyed.

The first performance was by soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson with the composer at the piano, at the Library of Congress, October 30, 1979. A recording of this performance has been issued by New World Records (NW 310).

– N. R.

Duration: *ca.* 18 minutes.

THE NANTUCKET SONGS

1. FROM WHENCE COMETH SONG?

Theodore Roethke

Ned Rorem

Free ♩=48 *f* *ff* *mf* ♩=63

From whence com-eth song? From the tear, far a-way, From the hound giv-ing tongue, From the quar-ry's weak

f

♩=48 *f* *ff* ♩=63

cry. From whence, love? From the dirt in the street, From the bolt stuck in its groove, From the cur at my

f

♩=48 *ff* ♩=63 *dim.*

feet. Whence, death? From dire hell's mouth, From the ghost with-out breath,

ff

mp

The wind shift-ing south.

mf *mp*

8va bassa

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2. THE DANCE

William Carlos Williams

Ned Rorem

Exuberant ♩=160

In Breu - ghel's great pic - ture, The Ker - mess, the

dan - cers go round, they go round

and a - round, the squeal and the blare and the

twee - dle of bag - pipes, a bu - gle and fid - dles tip - ping their

(8va)

bel - lies (round as the thick - sid - ed glass - es whose

8va

wash they im - pound) their hips and their bel - lies off

bal - - ance to turn them.

8va

ff

(8va)

fff

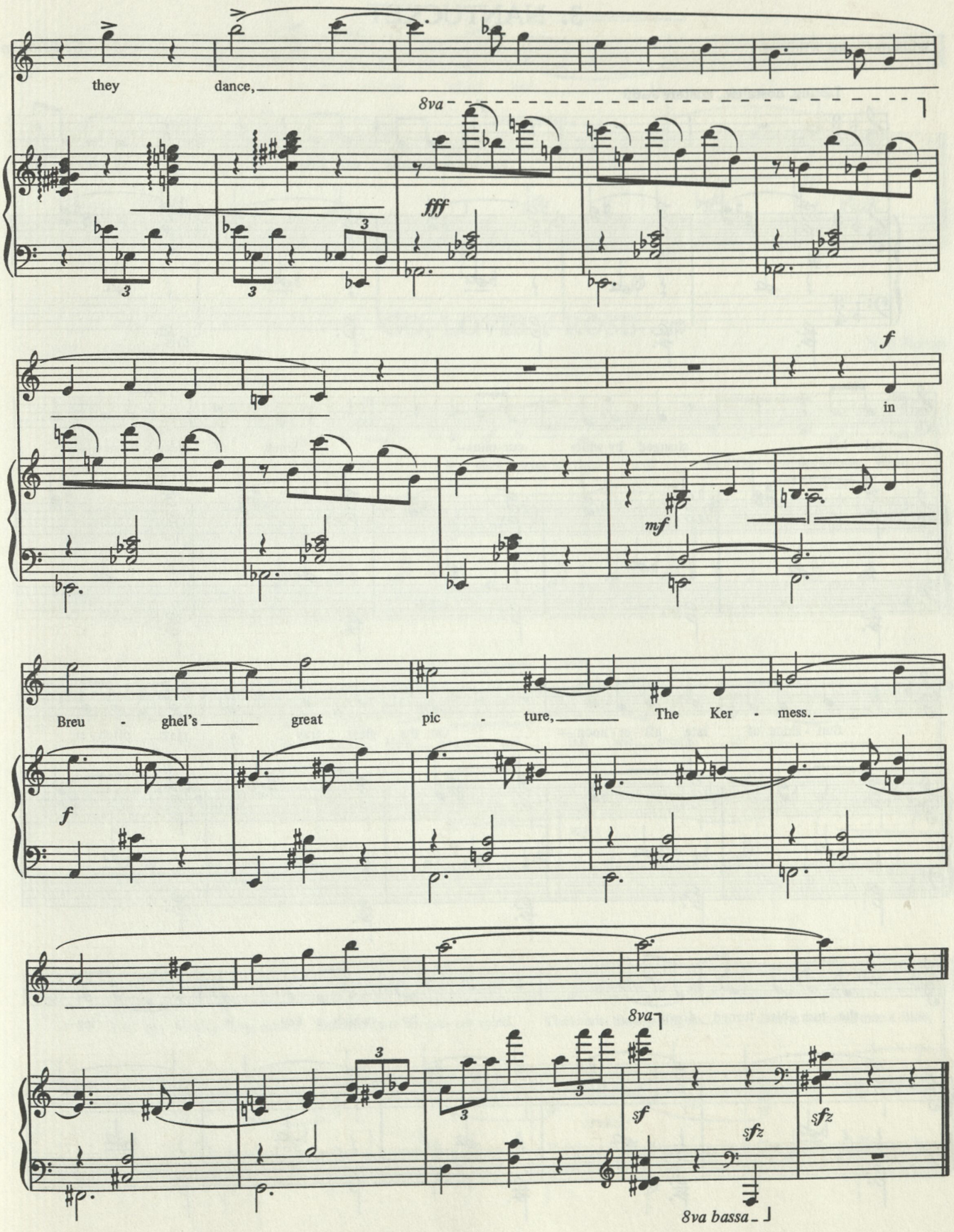
ff

Kick -

- ing and roll-ing a-bout the Fair_____ Grounds, swing-ing their butts, those shanks must be

f

sound____ to bear up un - der such rol-lick-ing mea - sures, prance as


they dance,
8va
fff
f
in
mf
Breu - ghel's great pic - ture, The Ker - mess.
f
8va
sf
sfz
sfz
8va bassa

3. NANTUCKET

William Carlos Williams

Ned Rorem

Lilting, nostalgic, austere ♩=69

p

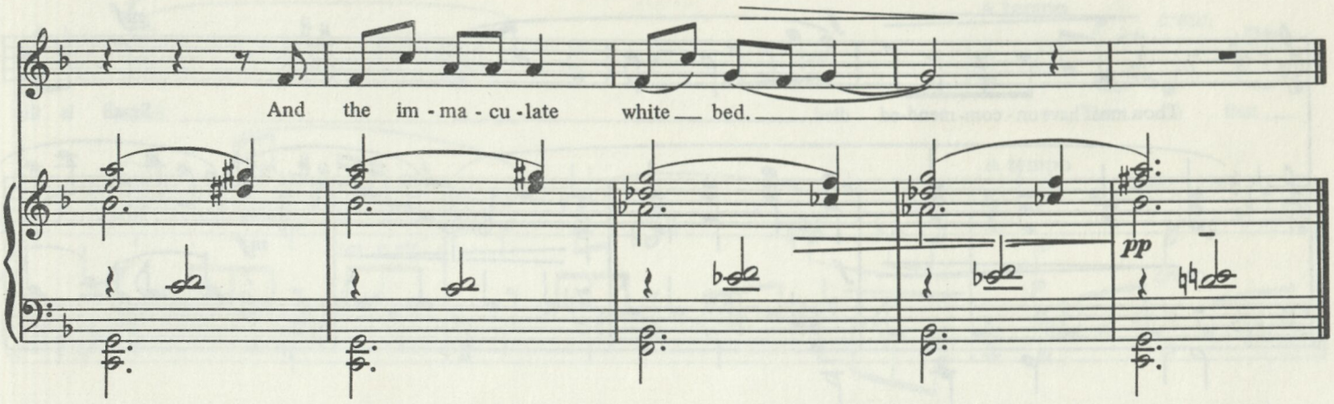
Flowers through the win - dow lav - en - der and

p

yel - low changed by white cur - tains— Smell of clean - li - ness—

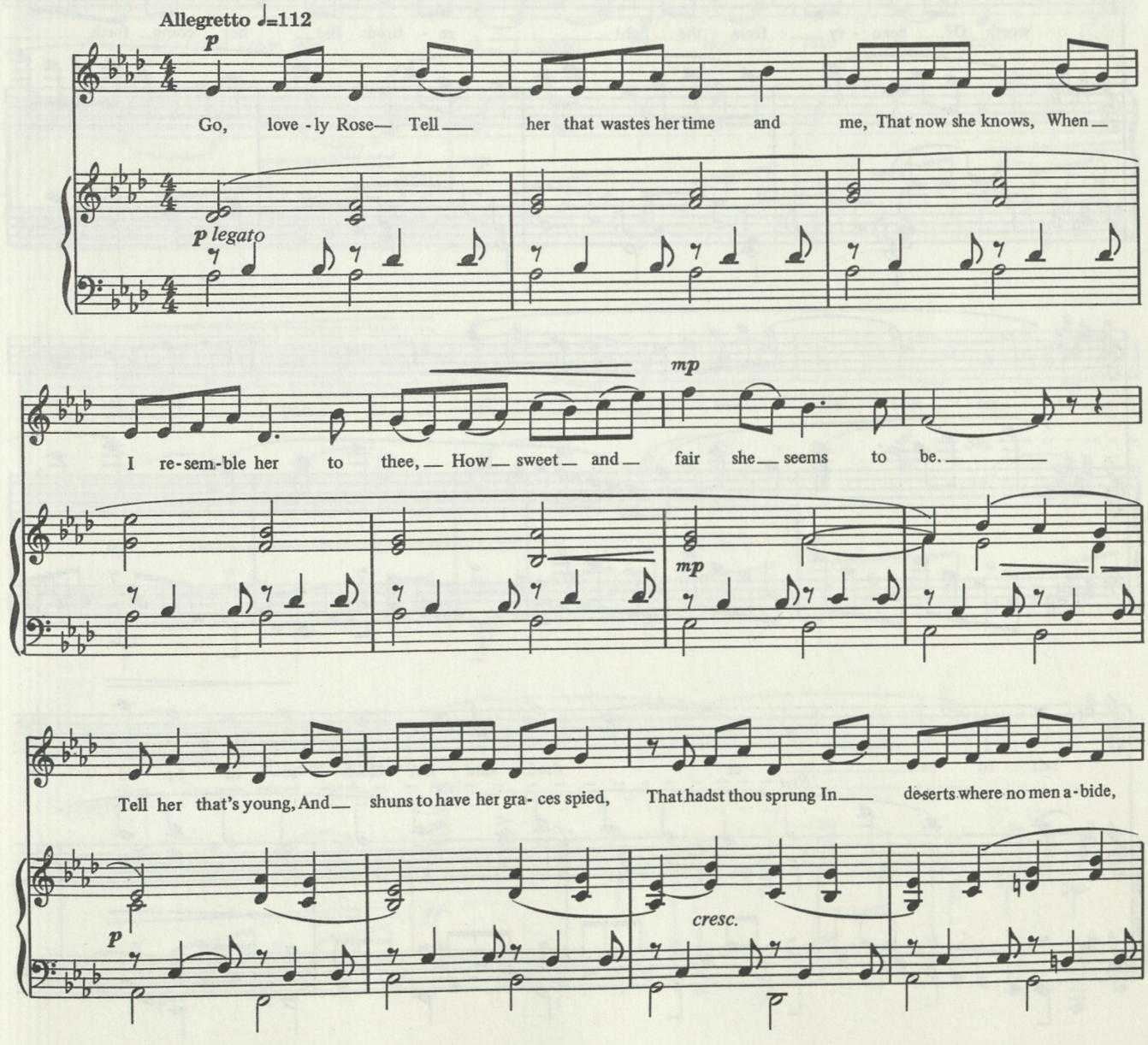
Sun - shine of late aft - er - noon— On the glass tray a glass pitch - er,

the tum - bler turned down, by which a key is ly - ing—



4. GO, LOVELY ROSE

Edmund Waller — Ned Rorem



f *mf*

Thou must have un - com-mend-ed died. Small is the

f *mf*

worth Of beau - ty from the light re - tired: Bid her come forth,

Suf - fer her -

self to be de - sired, And not blush so to be ad -

8va

f *rit.*

mired.

dim. e rit.

f

A tempo

p *cresc.*

Then die that

A tempo

p *cresc.*

she The com - mon fate of all things rare May read in thee; How

mp

small a part of time they share That are so

mf

f

8va

won - drous sweet and fair!

(8va)

ff

poco rall.

5. UP-HILL

Christina Rossetti

Ned Rorem

♩=c.72 The questions must be nervous and hastening. The answers, as though by another voice, are cool and held back.

mp *f*

Does the road wind up - hill

mp *f*

rit. *p*

all the way?

Slower ♩=c.60

mp

Yes, to the ver - y end.

pp *mp* *accel.*

Faster (♩=72)

mp *f* *mf* *rit.*

Will the day's jour - ney take the whole long day?

mf *rit.*

Slower (♩=60)

mp

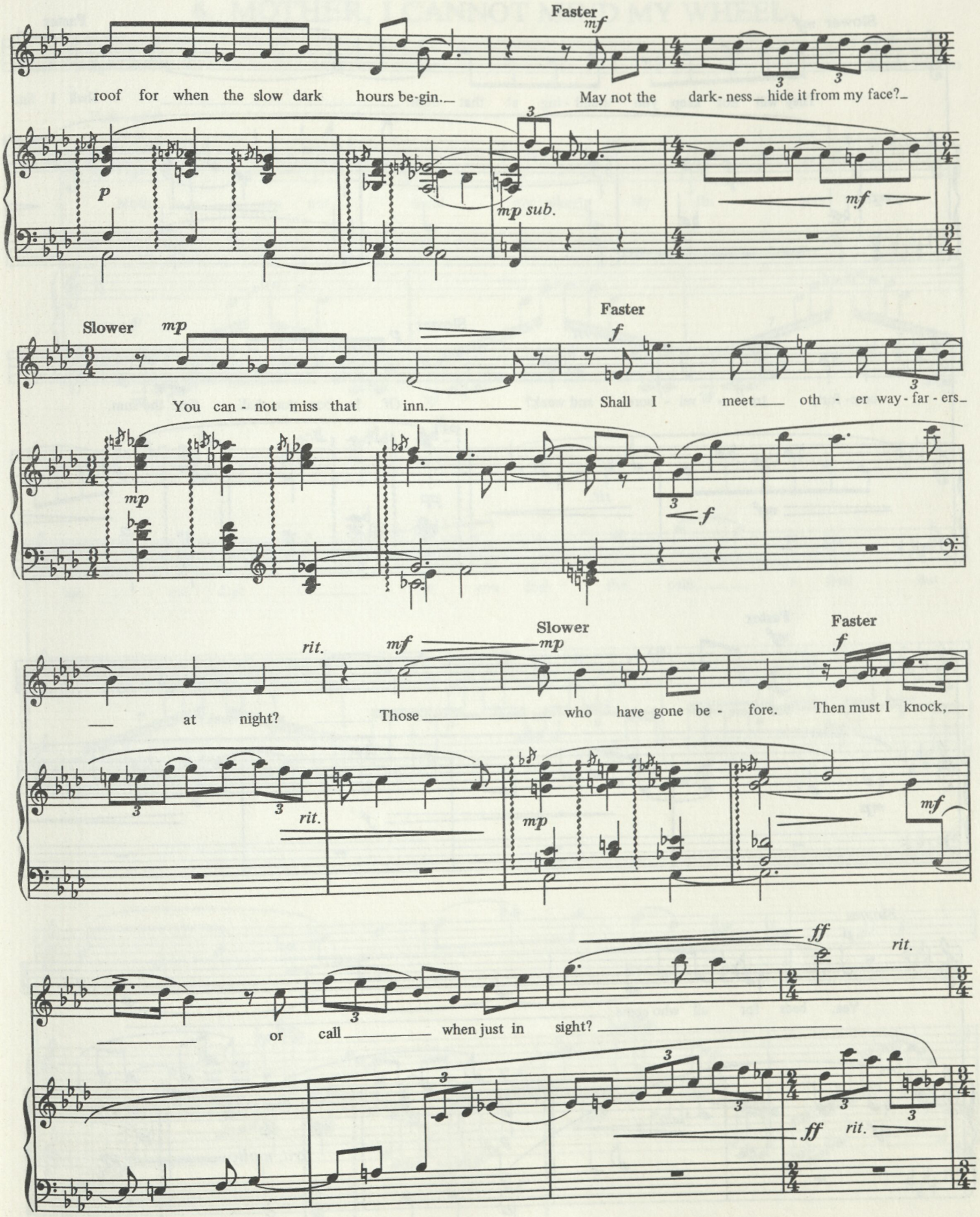
Faster *mf*

rit.

Slower *mp*

From morn to night my friend. But is there for the night a rest - ing place? A

pp *sub. mp* *rit.*


Faster
mf
roof for when the slow dark hours be-gin.
May not the dark-ness hide it from my face?
p
mp sub.
mf
Slower
mp
You can-not miss that inn.
Faster
f
Shall I meet oth-er way-far-ers
mp
f
rit.
mf
Slower
mp
Faster
f
at night? Those who have gone be-fore. Then must I knock,
rit.
mp
mf
ff
rit.
or call when just in sight?
ff
rit.

Slower *mf*

They will not keep you stand - ing at that door.

Faster

Shall I find

mp

com- fort, tra - vel - sore and weak?

rit.

Slower *p*

Of la - bor you shall find the sum.

mf

rit.

pp

Faster

mf

Will there be beds for me and all who seek?

mp

f

Slower

p

Yea, beds for all who come.

mf

p

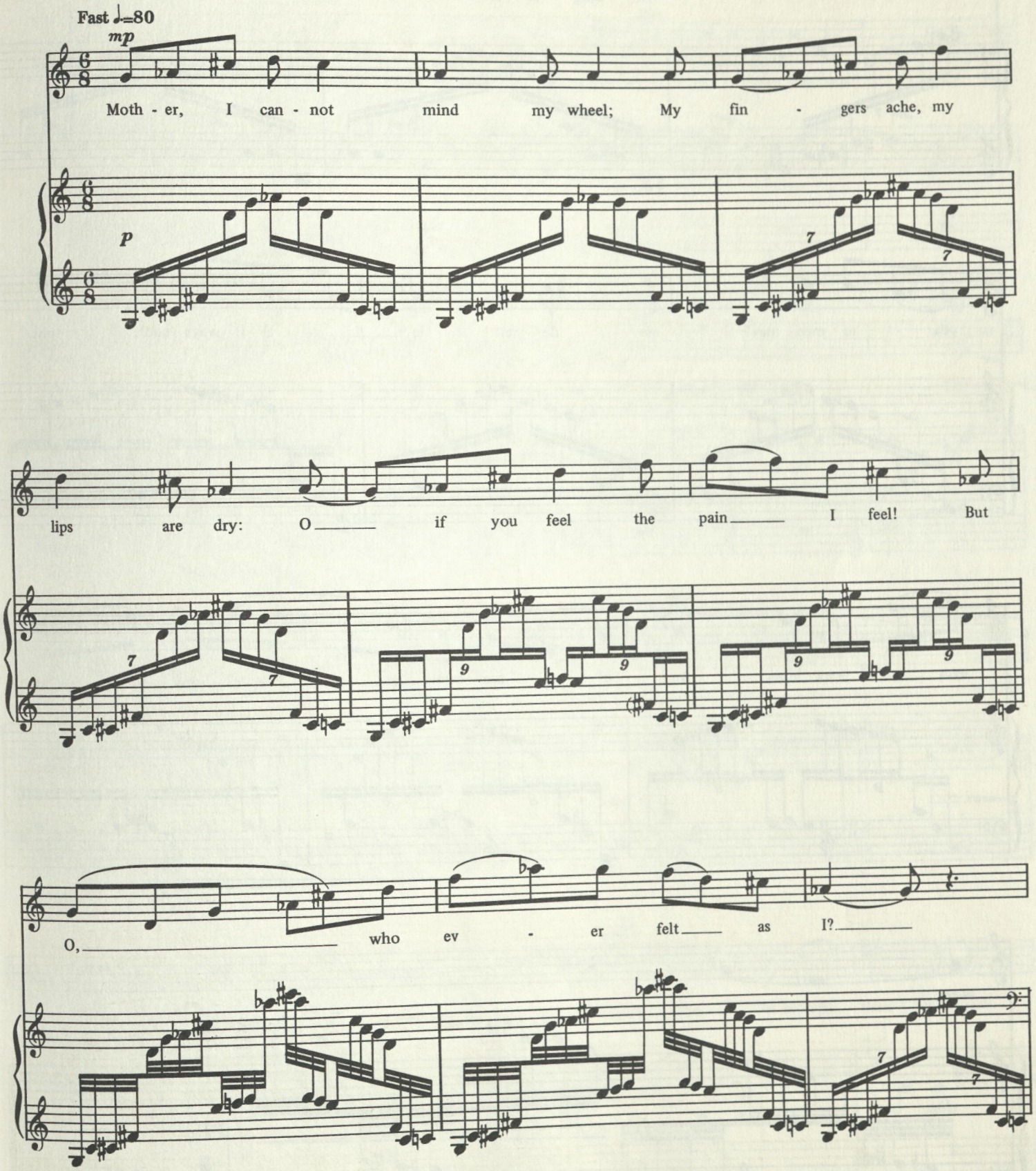
trit. molto

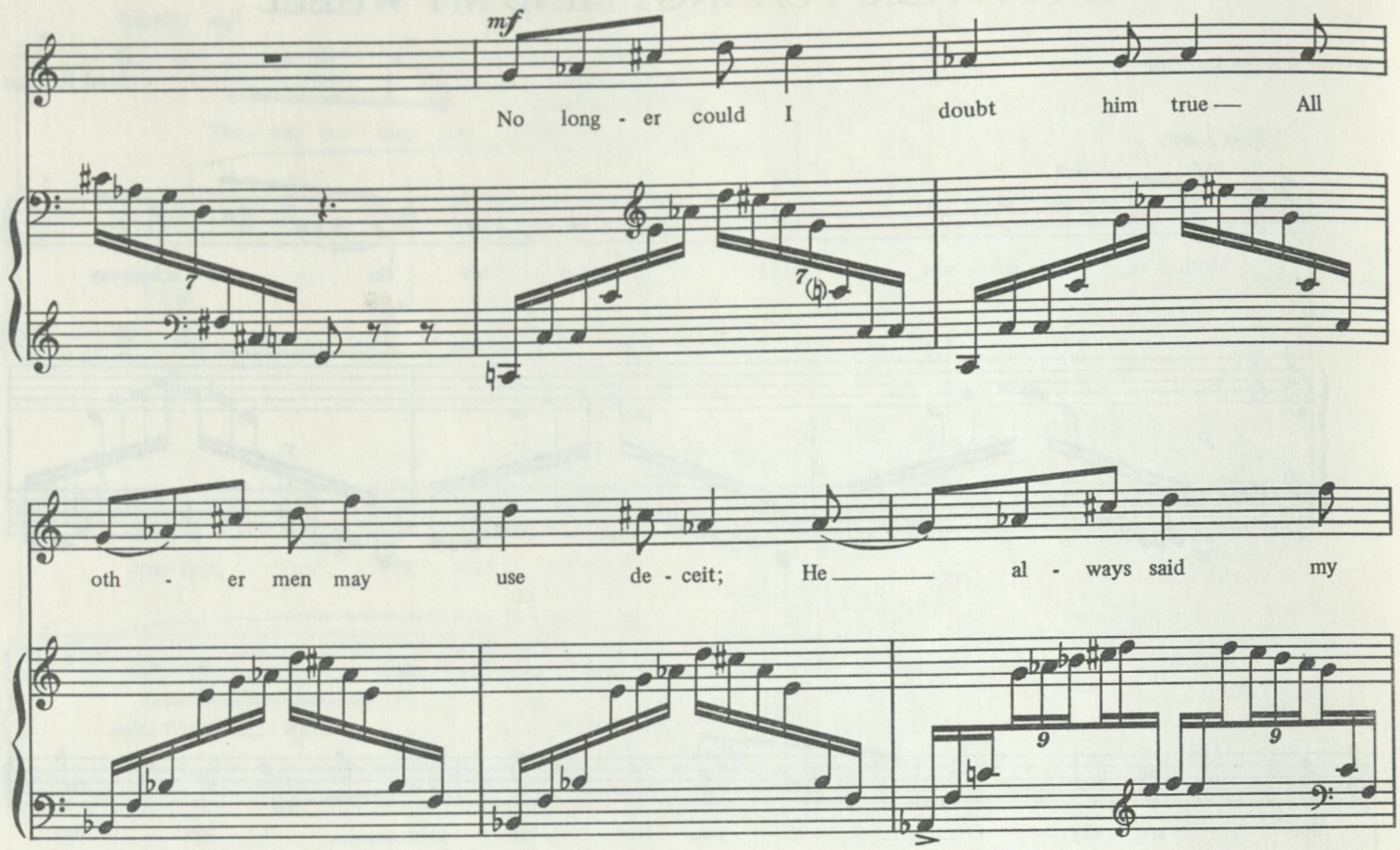
pp

6. MOTHER, I CANNOT MIND MY WHEEL

Walter Savage Landor

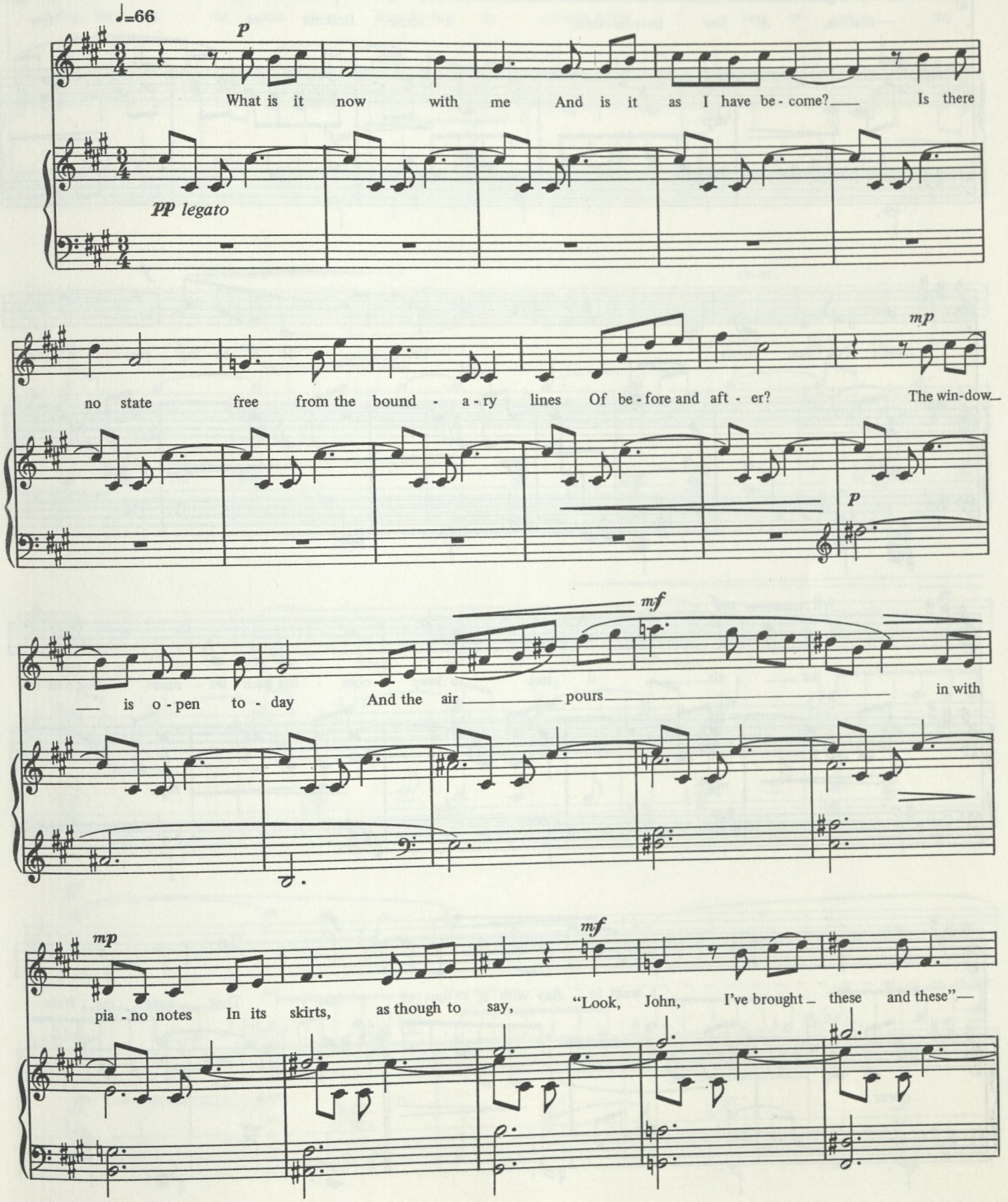
Ned Rorem




mf
No long - er could I doubt him true — All
oth - er men may use de - ceit; He ——— al - ways said my
eyes ——— were blue. And of - ten swore ——— my lips ——— were
f
sweet. ———
8va
dim.
mp

7. FEAR OF DEATH

John Ashbery — Ned Rorem



—that is, A few Beet-ho-vens, some Brahms - es, A few

choice Pou - lenc notes . . . Yes, ____ It is be - ing free a - gain,

the ____ air, ____ it has to keep com - ing back Be - cause that's all it's

good for. I want to stay with it out of fear That keeps me from

walk - ing up cer - tain steps, Knock - ing at cer-tain doors, fear of grow - ing

old A - lone, *cresc.* and of find - ing no

one at the eve - ning end Of the path ex - cept an -

oth - - er my - self

8va

Nod-ding a curt greet- ing: "Well, ___ you've been a-while But now we're back to -

(8va)

mf

geth - er, which is what ___ counts." Air ___ in my path, you could short - en this,

mp

A tempo

poco rit.

P

But the ___ breeze had dropped, and si - lence

poco rit.

pp A tempo

is the last ___ word. ___

8va

ppp

8. THOUGHTS OF A YOUNG GIRL

John Ashbery

Ned Rorem

Freely effusive, not slow ♩=c.69

Voice alone

f

"It is such a beau-ti-ful day — I had to write you a let - ter From the

mf

tower, — and to show I'm not — mad: — I on - ly slipped on the cake of soap — of the

f

mf

air — And drowned — in the bath - tub — of the world. — You were

molto

too good to — cry — much — o - ver me. — And — now I let you

ff

rall.

p

go." —

Signed, The Dwarf.

A bit slower ♩=58

mp

I passed by late in the af - ter-noon — And the smile — still — played — a-bout her lips As it

has for cen - tu-ries — She al - ways knows — How — to be — ut-ter-ly de-light-ful.

f espr.

Oh my daugh-ter, — My — sweet - heart, — daugh - ter — of my —

mf

mp

rit.

p

late em-ploy-er, prin - cess, May you not be long — on the way! —

9. FERRY ME ACROSS THE WATER

Christina Rossetti

Ned Rorem

Very very languorous ♩=48

p

"Fer - ry me a - cross the wa - ter, Do, boat-man, do" "If

pp

you've a pen - ny in your purse I'll fer - ry you." "I have a pen - ny in my purse, And my eyes are blue; So

p

fer - ry me a-cross the wa-ter Do, boat-man,do!" "Step in - to my fer - ry-boat, Be they black or blue, And

pp

for the pen - ny in your purse I'll fer - ry you."

p *pp* *P* *ppp*

10. THE DANCER

Edmund Waller

Ned Rorem

Big and quick and nervous, always strict

♪=♪ sempre =276 (♩=138)

8va

fff

mp

Be - - hold the brand of beau - ty tossed!

p

mf

See how the mo - tion does di - late the flame!

tr

mf

p

tr

mf

De - light - ed love his spoils does boast, And tri-umph in this game.

mp

f mf mp

Fire, to no place con - fined, Is both our won - der and our fear;

f mf mp

f

Mov - ing the mind, As light - ning hurled through the

f

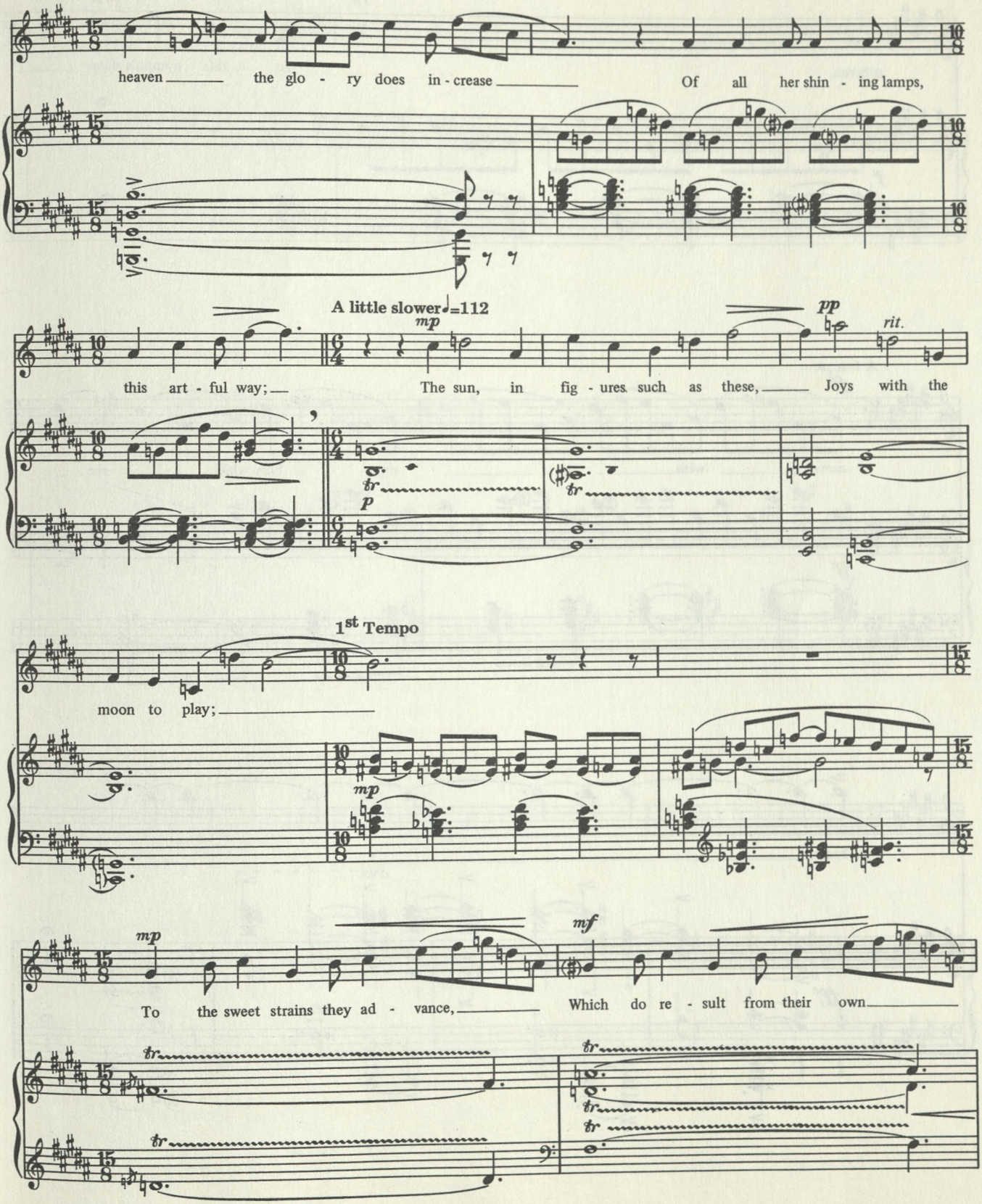
ff

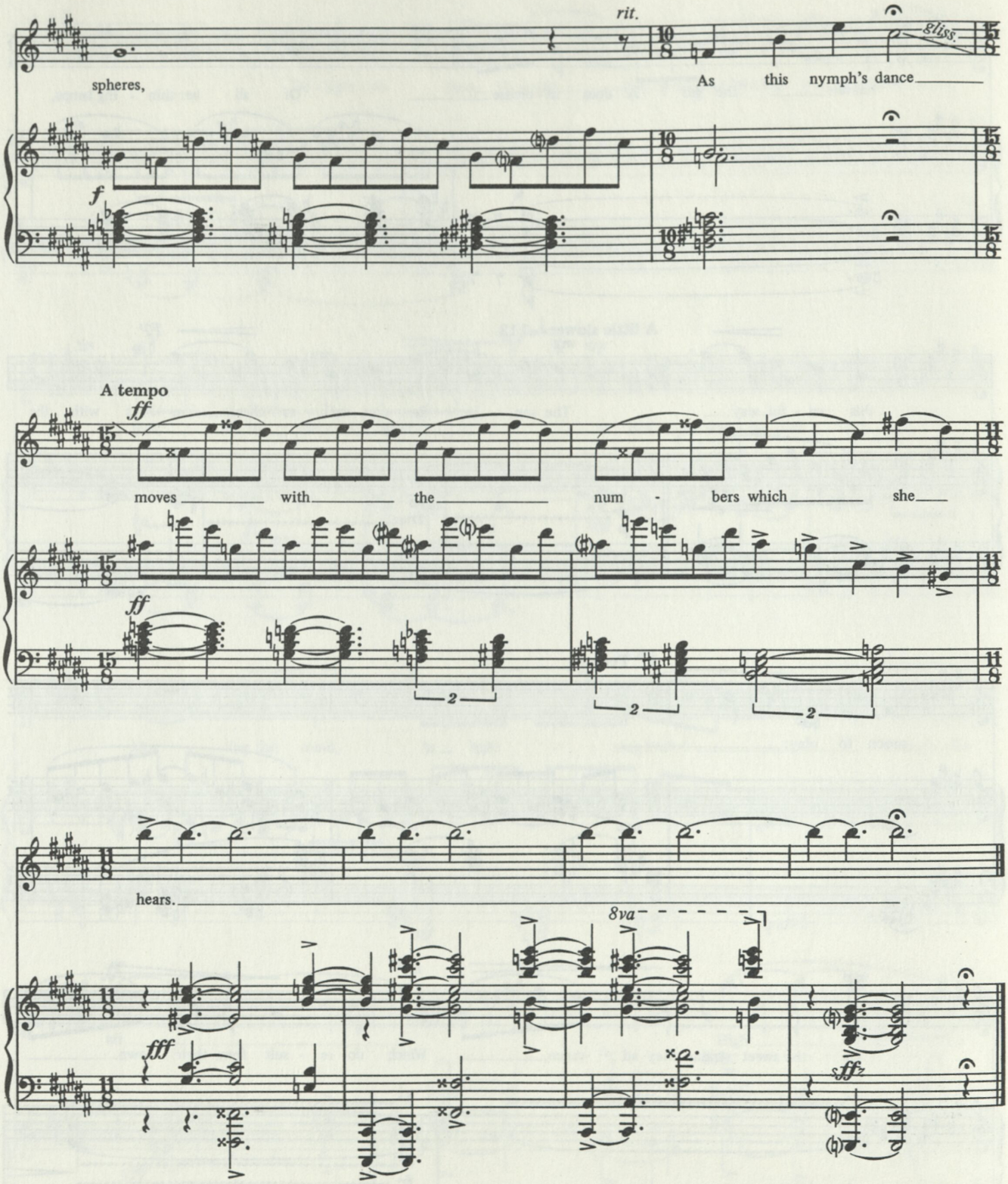
air. High

8va

fff

8va


heaven the glo - ry does in - crease Of all her shin - ing lamps,
A little slower ♩=112
mp
pp
rit.
this art - ful way; The sun, in fig - ures such as these, Joys with the
tr
p
1st Tempo
moon to play;
mp
mf
To the sweet strains they ad - vance, Which do re - sult from their own
tr


rit.
gliss.
spheres,
As this nymph's dance
f
A tempo
ff
moves with the num - bers which she
ff
2
2
2
hears.
8va
fff
ff